THE BEST OF THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT:

No. 3 and No. 4 OF A SERIES OF REPRINTS

Maurice de La Sizeranne — The Blind as Seen Through Blind Eyes

Valentin Hauy — An Essay on the Education of the Blind

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MAURICE DE LA SIZERANNE: A PORTRAIT

By Berthold Lowenfeld

Maurice de la Sizeranne was born in 1857 and died in 1924. He lost his sight at eleven years as a result of an accident. His family lived in comfortable circumstances and he was educated at the Paris Institute for the Young Blind and later taught music there for some time. He soon found his real mission in organizing efforts to improve the conditions of the blind.

He devised a braille shorthand system which was adopted or served as a pattern in many other countries. In 1883, he founded the Journal Valentin Hauy, a forum in which all problems concerning the blind were discussed. Later on he established "Louis Braille", a magazine printed in braille which became popular throughout the world. In order to offer to the blind literary enjoyment he founded the "Revue Braille." These were only some of his activities, but he also founded a braille library and the Museum Valentin Häuy.

His most important single contribution was the founding of the Association Valentin Häuy, the general purpose of which was the promotion of the welfare of the blind. He became General Secretary of the Association and his influence as a moving force in work for the blind became international. He strongly believed in the intellectual capacities of the blind which, until his time, were greatly neglected. He stood for the idea "that none better than the blind themselves can appreciate the needs of the blind," as F. Park Lewis, M.D., who translated "The Blind as Seen Through Blind Eyes" remarked in his Preface.

Among his writings, his volume "The Blind as Seen Through Blind Eyes" is outstanding. It was published in 1888 and received the commendation of the French Academy in 1889.

F. Park Lewis, M.D., an ophthamologist who was a member of the Board of Trustees of the New York Institution for the Blind, translated it into English and it was published by G. P. Putnam & Sons in 1893. It was characterized in its introduction to the French edition as, "This is not only a good book, it is a good deed."

While Sizeranne's writing of about eighty years ago carried the unmistakable flavor of his time, he anticipated many ideas which are now up-to-date and some for which we still struggle.--B.L.

THE BLIND AS SEEN THROUGH BLIND EYES*

By Maurice de La Sizeranne

CHAPTER II

The Intellectual Qualities of the Blind

BLINDNESS, it is hardly necessary to say, in no way affects the mentality in its development. The paleographer with his sight dulled by age, may not be able to decipher the yellow parchments of by-gone centuries, but this fact in no degree lessens his interest in the secrets that they have to tell. The intelligence of the happy child who in the excitement of his play thrusts his eye on the point of his mother's scissors, or who receives in his eyes drops of corroding caustic, is not in the least affected intellectually thereby. The child when his wounds are healed—blind though he be—starts with renewed ardor, and the holy father intrenched behind his work quickly recovers himself, and, if he have truly the sacred fire, resumes by other means, but almost always with the same enthusiasm, his work, while the other returns to his play.

What actually have they lost, either of the two,—the child or the man? An instrument, and nothing more. A strong, valuable instrument, I will allow, but is it an indispensable one? I insist that it is not; and it will suffice to recall the names of Milton and Sanderson, Augustus Thierry, Fawcett, George V. of Hanover,[1] and many others which defy contradiction.

In the Researches on the Human Understanding by Reid, is a curious and most interesting chapter which shows so fully the possibilities of the blind, that I am strongly tempted to quote it entire. Unfortunately it is too long, but I cannot resist the desire to reproduce a few of the most important passages.

> "Sight discloses little that the blind may not be made to understand the reason therefor."

This is the title of the first chapter, and for the blind is a most precious acknowledgment.

> "We will readily appreciate the reason of this," says the author, "if we will take the trouble to compare the appearance which an object presents to the eye with the description given of it. I believe that a man born blind may have a very distinct idea,

*First published in France, 1888. Authorized translation by F. Park Lewis, M.D.

if not of the thing itself, at least of something that closely resembles it," and further, "and of those things, the appearance of which can be only suggested or inferred, while he may not be able actually to picture them to himself, he can nevertheless understand perfectly from the description what they can do, and all the things of which we gain a knowledge by the eye, he may do the same by the ear." Reid then says, "that while a man born blind may not know himself that light exists, he has yet within his own head stars without number," and, he adds, "he may be made to have the clearest conception of it all.

"If," he continues, "it were as unusual to be born with the gift of sight as it now is to be born blind, those who saw would be regarded as extraordinary beings, as prophets inspired to instruct the darkened world, which could nevertheless be made to fully understand. We know that inspiration gives no new faculty. It conveys only in an especial manner and by extraordinary methods what the ordinary faculties of humanity can understand and may communicate to others by the usual way.

"If we admit the supposition that we have assumed, the gift of sight would appear to the congenitally blind as the gift of inspiration does to us, for the small number of those thus gifted may communicate their knowledge if they wish to those less fortunate. In truth they may not be able to give a distinct idea of the way in which they receive their impressions. A little round body stripped of its envelope would seem to be an instrument but illy fitted to develop a science more wonderful than the wildest dreams of fancy."

Relative to appearances, Reid says: "If we observe the operations of the mind in the use we make of this fancy, we will perceive that but little attention is paid to the appearance of visible objects, the appearance does not at all fix the attention, it seems only to reveal other things, and these things that are revealed may be easily and accurately conceived by one born blind."

After giving a number of appearances which are ignored, Reid adds:

"We might cite a thousand other instances which demonstrate that the visible appearances of objects are taken but as indications, and the mind passes rapidly to the thing signified without giving the least attention to the sign itself, and without even noting its existence. In like manner we pay almost no regard to the sounds of a language with which we have become familiar, and our attention is concentrated wholly on the things which they represent. The observation, then, of the Bishop of Cloyne is very important and true, when he says 'that the visible appearance is a kind of language which enables nature at a distance to inform us of the size and shape of things.'"

In a chapter on Visible Appearances, Reid shows that the man who educates only his sight, and forms his judgment of things only from their appearance, is often in his conclusions far from the

truth; and the man who does this frequently takes the signs for the things signified. This language being unknown to him, he is wholly unable to comprehend it, and his attention is concentrated upon the signs because he has no conception of what they signify. We, on the other hand, to whom the language is perfectly familiar, take no heed of the signs and devote our entire attention to the things to be explained. The question being so stated, it will be seen that the blind are deprived of nothing but a perception of the signs, and that every idea is fully accessible to the intelligence, when in fact the eye is reduced to an instrument of perception rather than one of understanding."[2]

In order that the faculties shall remain intact after blindness has come, however, it goes without saying that the loss of sight is not consequent upon disease of the brain, or if so the functions of the brain must be left unimpaired. The cause of blindness and the conditions precedent thereto must also of course be considered, as well as the age at which vision was lost, and on these will largely depend the intellectual condition. It is true that those blind from birth always will be deprived of certain things that sight alone can give, but too frequently these are exaggerated both in number and in importance. Moreover, there are relatively few who are congenitally blind.

I shall have the temerity to maintain that the sense of sight has not the preponderating value that a priori we are accustomed to accord to it. Both hearing and touch carry more accurate knowledge than vision. Sight indeed often deceives us, and touch, the closer sight, is constantly required to control and correct the wrong impressions conveyed by the eye. Hearing puts a man in direct contact with his fellows, and consequently with the moral and intellectual world.

Read again this page from our old Charron.

"The hearing is the spiritual sense. It is the medium and the agent of understanding; it is the instrument of the wise and the spiritual, capable of penetrating the depths not alone in the individual, but in the species, to which the sight can never reach, making clear things spiritual and divine which sight instead of aiding serves to obscure. Not only have many great savants been blind, but others who have lost their sight were the better able to philosophize thereby, but never one from being deaf. It is through the hearing that we enter the fortress and make ourselves masters. It is the agent of good and evil. It was by the sound of the harp that the wife of King Agamemnon preserved her chastity from many suitors. David by the same means drove out the evil spirits from Saul and he was restored to health. It was the sound of the flute which softened and strengthened the voice of the great orator Gracchus. In short, science, truth, and virtue have no other pathway by which they may enter the soul but through the ear. The Christian is instructed in his faith by the spoken word, and therein lies his hope of safety. In this sight is of no value to him. 'Faith is the belief in things not seen,' which are acquired through the ear, and apprentices and novitiates are termed auditors, κατηχουμενους. I will add that hearing is our chiefest protection in the darkness and during sleep, and it is then that

only by sound is provision made for our protection. For all these reasons the wisest advise that we keep pure and free from all corruption. For our inner safety, like that of a city, we must guard our outer gates and walls that the enemy may not enter."

Touch, taste, and smell, and to even a higher degree hearing, bring him into relation with the world of matter. What, then does he lack, and what faculties or functions are added to him by the sense of sight? A conception of colors, of perspective and certain physical beauties; and that is all. Aside from these, there are no intellectual conceptions that thorough teaching, and this is imperative, may not convey to even the congenitally blind.

Apropos of colors, I will again cite a passage from the observations of Reid:

"In regard to colors, a man who was born blind must necessarily be embarrassed, as he has nothing with which to compare them. However, by a sort of analogy he may measurably supplement his deficiency. For those who see, the color scarlet signifies an unknown quality in the object which represents to the eye an appearance often observed. . . .

"But it is quite possible to conceive that the eye is affected by different colors as the nose is by different odors, and the ear by different sounds. It may be conceived that to sight, scarlet differs from blue, as the sound of a trumpet differs from that of a drum, or as the odor of an orange differs from that of an apple. It is impossible to know whether or not scarlet appears to my eyes as it does to those of other men; and if, as may be, the same colors and sounds are unlike to different people, it will always be impossible for us to know wherein those differences consist. It follows obviously then, that one who has been always blind may yet speak so pertinently of colors, may answer in so satisfactory a way all the questions that could be put to him touching on their nature, their composition, their shades and brilliancy, as to make us forget that he lacks the organ that has given us our knowledge of these things."

If the child has not lost his sight till his eighth or ninth year, and especially if he be mentally bright and normally developed, he is absolutely on a level with those who see, for he will retain an idea of color and perspective, which valuable mental equipments are denied to those who have never seen. I have some reluctance in bringing my own personality into a consideration of this subject, but it is the simplest way, and with your permission I will do so.

I lost my sight when I was nine years of age, and I may say that more than twenty years have passed since I ceased to see. I now take the most lively interest in listening to discussions on art, perspective, values, harmony of tone, etc. Each year I have described to me the portraits, and the most interesting genre and landscape paintings as they appear, from those of the vaguist impressionists to the most radical realists. I read with care the art criticisms of the various expositions. The description of a picturesque view has the rarest charm for me. It is a pleasure for me to know what may be seen from any spot at which I find myself, the aspect of the country through which I

pass, the forms and shades of color of the clouds, and the glories of the sunset. It is not from idle curiosity, but because all of the things of which I speak are clearly pictured in my mind. I may say that being the son of a landscape painter I was brought up in the studio, and many a long hour have I patiently assisted in the mixing of color. The mysteries of perspective have been discussed a hundred times in my hearing; seated at a little table in a corner of the atelier I have myself striven, greatly to the detriment of my paper, to apply the colors. In Cassagne's first book of drawings is a certain mill, known doubtless to many a student, which no effort of mine could by any possible exertion be made to assume the form of any respectable mill anywhere on the globe. Heaven preserve me, however, from regretting these hours, for now I can picture in my mind a scene as it is described to me, and it seems to me that I have a larger intellectual life the more I identify myself with the impressions of others. I have always vividly represented to my mind the form, the shape, the color of the things that are spoken of in my hearing, and the scenes described. I have a peculiar fondness for the poetry of Victor Hugo, because of the richness in color of his figures. All of this goes to show, it seems to me, that the most varied ideas may not be foreign to one who has lost his sight in his early childhood. Of the two hearing is certainly the more intellectual of the senses, and I am satisfied that I should have been a thousand times more widely separated from the world of intelligence and life had I lost my hearing than I formerly should have been through the loss of sight. I say formerly with deliberation, because I feel that I am now in possession of an intellectual life, as intense as it is possible for me to enjoy.

I am compelled to say, at the risk of disappointing those who are in search of the philosopher's stone that a love of metaphysics is not as commonly found in the blind as among those who see. There are, however, blind amateur philosophers who will read perhaps with interest the following unpublished lines, written by the philosopher Azais after a conversation with the professors of the Institution for Blind Youths, Paris.

> "Aug. 26, 1842. I have received to-day a visit from M. Dufour, and from two other blind professors. We conversed together for more than three hours. I was greatly pleased by the profound intelligence with which they listened to me. It is marvellous to be so well understood on such deeply philosophic themes by men deprived of the sense of sight, and in consequence, having only incomplete ideas of the effects of light, effects which modify results throughout the universe. Doubtless the perfection with which the sense of hearing and that of touch are developed, aid their intellectual conceptions and enable them to get supplementary notions in harmony with those that they have directly received. This is, however, certain, that in hearing their deeply logical arguments on the most abstract subjects, one would perceive with surprise that he had forgotten that he was talking with blind men. They followed in the smallest detail the argument and its demonstration. I have never experienced, in conversing with men who saw, a more intellectual satisfaction, nor found their ideas more definite, more suggestive, nor more fully expressed."

Intellectual mediocrity, that mediocrity of a colorless, indifferent quality that characterizes the vast majority of human kind, largely predominates among the blind, and though brilliant examples of genius are not uncommon, they necessarily form the rare exception.

All that appeals to the imagination, however, has a singular fascination for the blind. Historical records, travels and purely literary works excite greater interest, I am inclined to believe, in the blind than in those who see. In our special schools, courses in history, in geography and literature are followed by those who have most moderate intellectual gifts with very unusual ardor. The blind are extremely fond of listening to reading aloud, and I wish that we might have the teachers in the vicinity of the poorer quarters of the city charged to give public readings for the blind, say twice each week. It would not be necessary to ring a bell in order to secure a good attendance.

When we read in our special schools from Thiers of the Italian or French Campagnes, when we are at the heart of Jerusalem Delivered, when we follow the fortunes of Cinna or Britannicus, one could hear the step of a mouse, and with the exception of a few poor imbeciles who were sleeping quietly, every hearer is held in willing captivity.

One who reads well may do what he will with his blind auditors. He has a most powerful wand, and no one can break the charm. Poetry, however, is one of the idolatries of the blind. More than two thirds of their raised print works are collections of verse. I have often remarked that the blind have actually a passion for poetry. Happy, indeed, when this passion may be satisfied by copying and memorizing the lines of others. It is a public calamity when their emotion can find vent only in versifying themselves. Not that I would throw stones at those who rhyme. I would certainly be attacking many honest souls. But it appears to me that none are justified in writing in verse unless they have been truly touched by the divine fire. It may be noted that I do not practise the same exclusiveness in regard to prose!

I believe that the blind, however, may be poets, and great poets. This has been contested. It has been said: "It is impossible that the poetry of the blind shall be true poetry, because they are shut out from grandest spectacles of nature, which chiefly fire the poetic imagination." But does there not still remain the entire domain of the moral life? Is it not a vast field? He who has explored it to the end, may he not well be crowned?

And then, if there be poetry in that which we see, may it not also be found in what we touch, and in what we hear? The essence of poetry penetrates into sounds and odors with a sort of magnetism, at certain times and seasons; it may be in the forest or on the mountain, by the seaside or the brook. Impressions come at such times with an intensity that sets our very being in vibration, and, without knowing how or why, so perfect is our harmony with our surroundings that all unconsciously we break into songs of joy, or of love, gladness, or of sorrow, and this emotion can be nothing other than poetry of the truest kind.

Doubtless the blind man who undertakes to picture for us a sunset, or a landscape, makes it ridiculous if in prose, unbearable in verse. But read over and again the descriptive lines of Lamartine, and you will realize that there are varied phases of nature which are wholly accessible to the blind.

It is told that La Motte-Houdard, who became blind at an early age, said to a young poet who had come to read to him one of his tragedies: "Your play is exceedingly beautiful, and I can promise for its success. I am pained by one thing, however, and that is that you have been guilty of plagiarism." "What,

sir, of plagiarism?" was the astonished exclamation. "Yes! And to prove how sure I am of what I say, I will recite for you the second scene of the fourth act, which I have learned by heart." La Motte recited this scene without the change of a single word. Every one listened with astonishment without knowing what to say. The author was even more disconcerted than the rest. When the wonderful old poet had sufficiently enjoyed the embarrassment of the young author, he said to him: "Be not distressed, my dear fellow; the scene which I have recited is entirely yours, but it fully deserves to be memorized by every lover of poetry: I made it my own as I heard you read it." This was certainly a remarkable feat of memory. Was it through his blindness, you ask, that La Motte had acquired this wonderful faculty? I doubt it very much. He had doubtless a special genius of the kind that enabled Pliny the Elder to repeat a long series of numbers, having no connection with each other, and which he had heard read but once or twice. But this is very sure, that the necessity that compels the blind to entrust many things to memory is calculated to largely develop that faculty in them. It seems to me that the blind students of this age do not accomplish the prodigious feats with which we are familiar by tradition. I know, however, an old blind professor who carries in his mind numerous musical compositions of various kinds; and another, a woman, who knows by heart a whole throng of classic tragedies, and remembers after a single reading the most complicated passages, and the most inextricable plots of political or diplomatic history.

There was a time when the blind wrote but little. In their instruction the oral method was much more commonly employed than the written, and without doubt the deprivation of books, the fact that the professor should know his text by heart, and the student learn his task from the mouth of his teachers, made necessary for both master and pupil an effort of memory that they are not obliged to make to-day. Notwithstanding this, although the blind are now compelled to use the memory more than those who see, as a rule they do use it only ordinarily well.

CHAPTER III

The Moral Qualities of the Blind

To characterize the blind morally is not an easy task. The reason is simple. Not more than any other class of individuals grouped because of physical peculiarities,—as near- or far-sightedness,—and aside from personality, modified by occupation or environment, do the blind constitute a class having qualities in common, and no single one gives a truthful idea of the class from which he has been taken.

You have doubtless often had pictured for you with pen or pencil what might be considered a composite portrait of the blind, and I might feel justified not only in assuming that such a sketch must be inaccurate and untrue, but in offering to replace it by a more faithful likeness. I might endeavor honestly to do this, but I should just as certainly fail as any who have tried before. My portrait would perhaps be an exact reproduction of some blind man; it could never represent the abstract blind.

We will go, if you please, into one of the special schools, and study the pupils at their work; for here, perhaps, more than elsewhere, will we find them unhampered by conventionalities and most at home.

Look at this blind boy, for instance, with his frank, open face. His masters say that he is a gentle, lovable, companionable fellow. His neighbor on the right, with a shock of stiff black hair, as unkempt as the rules of the school will permit, has a positive, rather sullen face and anyone will tell you, from the porter to the superintendent of the school, that he is self-contained, brusque, and rough. The boy on the left of the first pupil, however, is widely different from either of these. Here are but three of many. Take ten or twenty, and the same differences will be prominent. We may arrange them in groups having general points of resemblance, but the differences will be infinite when we recognize the thousand shades that make up an individuality. A good writer will find a dozen words that are synonyms; but a discriminating observer will encounter shades of difference in apparent likeness, more numerous in humanity even than in language.

The blind, like all minorities, have been synonymized to excess. Most of those who have written concerning them have proceeded from preconceived theories, and have made their subjects adapt themselves to inflexible Procrustean notions. A principle having been proposed, they deduce from it a multitude of conclusions, from which there is no escape. Certain philosophers have said that all thought emanates from the senses, and consequently the loss of one sense more or less changes the individual in his entirety. It has been decided, always from theory, that the blind, lacking one of the senses, must think and feel and act in accordance with certain established ideas. The conclusion is absolute, without appeal, and universal in its application, as are all the conclusions of those whose deductions are drawn from theory rather than from observation.

Let us in our consideration of this matter leave the assumed fundamental principles of knowledge and establish ourselves simply on a groundwork of facts.[3] Facts are the demand of to-day, and these, to be valuable, must be studied scientifically. In the past the blind have been analyzed and scheduled after this manner, but as one reads the result of such investigations it becomes evident that they have been studied as curious phenomena, or as wild animals, and not as living and emotional beings. The intelligent assistance of the object studied has not been employed to aid in these investigations, but in order to demonstrate the skill and power of induction of their delineators, and the blind must play the principal role. Hours will be spent in the consideration of this or that movement, and every action will be carefully watched and noted. From these data, examined at leisure, inferences are drawn and conclusions reached. This is all very good, but the result is always abundantly admixed with error. There remains for this method no other procedure. When they undertake, on the other hand, to study men, whether they see or whether they do not see, it is a far different matter. They are then in the presence of an intelligent being, and it concerns them to remember this. It is better undoubtedly that the investigation be sometimes conducted silently and unconsciously to its subject, who may then be surprised in acts detected in all of their spontaneity. But this method must not be considered except as preparatory to, or in verification of, more serious and more exact observations, which must be made with the active concurrence of the moral being observed. That this may be done one must see him for a long time, must live with him, must enter into his life, inquire of him, converse with him socially, to the end that he shall be known as he is, and not merely as he appears upon the surface. The observations must be carried over a large number of individuals. Then, only, may one hope to know one's subject experimentally, and that with the blind, for example, all of their characteristics in many and various shades may be discovered and recognized.

If you have ever read half a dozen lines written by the class of observers referred to, you will have seen the affirmations that the blind are egotistical, proud, self-contained, or it may be that they are happy or they are sad. I deny most positively such statements, not because there is little in them complimentary to their subjects, but because it is certainly quite as reasonable to say that the blind are large, or that they are small, they are light or dark, or poor or rich. I condemn absolutely such comprehensive generalizations. It must be admitted that there are among the blind those who are proud, or who are egotistical, and I will willingly supplement this list with a multitude of adjectives far less flattering to the substantives which they qualify.

But the important point to make clear is this: We have noted in the blind certain marked defects. Are these due to the fact of their being blind, and might it not be possible for the blind not to have them? In a word, has blindness the inevitable faculty of making those who suffer from it proud, egotistical, self-sufficient, and ungrateful? That is the question. I unhesitatingly say No! And the reason for my belief is this: Too large a number of blind children, like those mentally deficient, while most tenderly cared for in their homes, are most deplorably educated. We must look here then to find that the unlovely qualities which are given as a birth-right to all children, to those who are blind as to those who see, are allowed to develop and are the cause of the defects of which we have spoken. They are due to deficient or injudicious training, and to this alone.

It is exceptional indeed, much as it is to be regretted, that blind children, whether among the poor or the rich, have been properly educated. Sometimes they are neglected, and pushed aside, and then they suffer either materially or morally, and in a majority of instances both materially and morally. Sometimes, on the other hand, they are spoiled by petting and excessive indulgence. Each member of the family is on his feet, anxious to gratify the blind child's slightest whim.[4] They have constant excuses for his greatest follies, and all that he does even ordinarily well receives most lavish praise. How could it be possible for a child under such conditions to be other than intensely disagreeable? Would not similar training produce in the most lovable child, blessed with two good eyes, identical results? It must not then be said that blindness causes pride and all other faults, but rather that blindness is not a talisman that will guard against the common failings of humanity.

It is an ungrateful task to speak of those who are merely commonplace, in whom is found nothing of the marvellous. The wonderful always fascinates, whether it be good or evil. A writer is saved if he may only say: "Those of whom I write are most extraordinary prodigies." Without this, in fact, why should one speak, or still less, why should one write of them at all?

The blind, perhaps more than most people, have a love of order, at least in the disposition of the furniture and movable objects around the room. But in little affairs, if I know among the blind those who are methodical, I know others also who have so little system as to make wildly jealous the most disorderly of those who see. The necessity for system is impressed upon the blind at every turn they make. As a book or other object cannot be seen it must be searched for, and in order that the furniture may not be stumbled over, orderly habits become imperative.

A house that is always disarranged is agreeable to no one. It is peculiarly embarrassing for the blind, who are obliged to move carefully and hesitatingly if chairs and tables are constantly displaced.

Diderot, in his famous Lettres sur les Aveugles, said of the blind Puyseau, the only blind man studied by him, and from whom he has deduced all of his theories, that he worked by night, that he might not be disturbed, and that in the morning his wife found everything in perfect order. To me this demonstrates but one of two things: First, that this blind Puyseau was an odd sort of fellow, with whom I would prefer not to live; or, second, his wife must have been a virago, and only in the night could the poor devil of a distiller find sufficient quiet to make his liquors.

Blindness develops the faculty of observation. When one cannot see and is obliged to draw in large part therefore upon the other faculties, he must analyze and examine more in detail all of the impressions that are conveyed to his other senses. This develops a mental alertness in many, and together with it frequently a gravity of demeanor that may pass for wisdom.

It is very generally admitted that the blind as a class are a happy, cheerful people, while the deaf, on the other hand, are generally sad. But to those who know the blind well it is evident that the gayety so commonly remarked is rather subjective than objective. Let me explain. When we see the blind together we expect, do we not, to find them lugubrious and sad, deploring in continual and tearful elegies the unhappiness of being deprived of the magnificent spectacle of the azure vault above, of the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and of all else that enters into a classical description of nature? We come to them then prepared to pity and console. In reality, however, we meet with nothing of the kind. We find ourselves in the presence of a child, or it may be a man who talks with us on every subject under the sun except his blindness, and this occurs to him only at times, as for instance when something round escapes from his fingers and he has difficulty in finding it again. As a result the natural surprise and the excess of sympathetic tenderness which is not called into requisition lead us to look upon the blind, as a class, as of joyous disposition.

Very often, too, a parallel is established between the happiness of the blind and the sadness of the deaf. And may this not also be explained in the same way? The first impression of the deaf-mute, is as a rule, much more pleasing than is that of the blind. A visitor who for the first time enters a school of deaf-mutes and a school for the blind will find much less that is unusual in the former than in the latter. The deaf children are physically not unlike other children. You approach the deaf without apprehension, for there is no outward mark to indicate their infirmity. It is unusual that the defect of the blind is not at once evident. Almost always the lids are partially closed or the eyes enlarged or atrophied, and the impression produced is one of sadness or of pity. But this first impression is quickly dissipated, because the more intimately you know the blind the more quickly are you put at your ease, and you feel the barrier disappear that is separating you. If your blind acquaintance prove to be a man of intelligence you end by forgetting his blindness completely in the interest of your conversation. With the deaf-mute, on the other hand, the impressions are reversed. The longer you remain in his presence the more his deafness weighs on you. It is intolerable to converse with one who talks much; it cannot be much less painful if he does not talk at all, or is merely deaf and compels you to repeat every word before he can understand you at all. If the results are compared you will, implicitly at least, make brevet generals of gayety of the blind en masse.

The fact is that the blind are not by reason of their blindness levelled down to an equalization of character. Those who live with them will find all kinds of humors, the melancholy and the serious, the happy and the careless. I think that I may say that I know them well and intimately; those of all ages, of all social conditions, and of the most varied characteristics. I know some who are of the finest fibre, with the loveliest dispositions, delicately organized, perfectly attuned, who are loved by all who know them. I know others who are waspish, pretentious, unlovely, and unloved. There are those who are gentle, and those who are passionate, those who are modest, rarely speaking of themselves, and others who are talkative and absorbed in their own personality.

In a word, we will find among the blind the same varied characteristics and qualities as among those who see, neither more nor less, and I trust that those who, with me, grant without the slightest hesitancy that the blind are not by nature worth more than other men, will with equal readiness believe me when I affirm that they are not worth less.

Have I succeeded in giving a just idea of the physical, of the mental, and of the moral attributes of the blind? Can I hope that if to-morrow one of my readers should see coming to him a blind man who has been well educated he will not have an apprehension of finding himself face to face with an extraordinary being in every respect, necessarily awkward, clumsy, embarrassed, and embarrassing, one who is gloomy, rude, unfeeling, unthinking, unreasoning, not speaking as others do, a being having a material, a moral, and an intellectual life altogether singular? One who in a word could inspire one's curiosity or one's compassion, but to whom one must always give, and from whom one could receive nothing useful nor pleasant except his thanks—on the condition that he be not ungrateful? If, then, I have succeeded in restoring to the blind their just estate, I may be followed into the interior of a blind school without apprehension, but before we study what the blind are taught, we will first see how they are instructed.

We will not touch on the instruction of the blind, however, without first speaking of the revered founder of schools for the blind, Valentine Hauy, and I believe it will be both interesting and profitable to sketch the portrait of that grand old philanthropist.

FOOTNOTES

[1]"A propos of the royal blind may be cited the Prince of Monaco, Charles III., of whom Liegarde has rightly said: 'Here is a subject equally attractive for either pen or pencil. The majesty of his countenance on which suffering had left a melancholy pallor was but the reflection of a soul filled with light. When the night settled down upon his eyes, the night that so quickly sunk into the heart, it seemed as if an aurora arose to take the place of all light that the eyes had lost. Deprived of a beloved companion and left wholly alone, the Prince knew of but one aim, to bring light in the darkness, to bring happiness to his people. From then on reform followed reform, and largess succeeded bounty.'"—STEPHEN LIEGARDE: La Cote d'Azur.

[2]Works of Thomas Reid, Superintendent of the Scotch School for the Blind.
Of direct interest in this connection is the discussion on "Intelligence" by Taine.

[3]This is a grave question. If it be true that blindness produces consequences as radical in the moral and intellectual sphere as in the physical such as to annihilate the perception of light, then the blind are radically different from those who see, and must be so regarded.

[4]In an educational novel, now almost forgotten, by Madame Guizot, appears an excellent portrait of a blind child, of a naturally sweet and winning disposition, but rendered absolutely unbearable by the foolish indulgences of an over-fond mother. See The Student, or Ravul and Victor, by Mme. Guizot.

Les Vertus et les Arts lui pretent leur flambeau ;
Pour eclairer l'Aveugle au fond de son tombeau.

Gravé d'après le Tableau Original Peint par Mme. le Fuvart, par M. Sergent.

1786

VALENTIN HÄUY: A PORTRAIT

By C. Warren Bledsoe

Valentin Häuy (pronounced AW-eee) is generally credited with having been the pioneer in Europe of formal education for blind children. He aspired to develop both academic training and skills for them which would insure dignity as well as a livelihood. He was most effective as the founder of "L'Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles" (Institution for Young Blind People) in Paris in 1784. Born in 1745, he lived from the age of Louis XV through the French Revolution, the First Empire and into the Bourbon Restoration. He attempted with varying success to influence each succeeding régime in behalf of blind children. His deep preoccupation with their needs carried him through the political disruptions of his time, but he incurred the displeasure of most parties through his lack of commitment to any cause except that of blind people. Though essentially a libertarian, his major successes occurred when he influenced benevolent royalty, chiefly Louis XVI and King Frederick Wilhelm III of Prussia.

Häuy's "Essay on the Education of the Blind" came after approximately 17 years of reflection and experimentation and represented his high point of usefulness. It was written for King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette when Häuy and his pupils were their guests for an eight-day visit at Versailles during the Christmas holidays of 1786.

An article in the Paris-Journal of January 1, 1787, described the performance of Häuy's students on this occasion before an audience chiefly remembered in history for having died on the guillotine five years later:

> "Geographical relations were pointed out by Lesueur, the blind professor, both with and without the aid of cards in relief. Quite difficult fractions were reduced to the same common denominator with such a degree of exactitude that the Duc d'Angoulême, to the infinite amusement of the court, sat pen in hand and worked out the problems with them. The pupils presented to the King and the Royal Family a book printed by themselves, 'Essay on the Education of the Blind,' with an ode by M. Huard, one of themselves, followed by models of their little printed works, which had been executed under the careful instruction of M. Clousier, printer to His Majesty, who was second only to Häuy himself in his unselfishness and disinterested zeal for the blind."

In the few remaining years of the old régime, Häuy's school rode the crest of royal patronage, which showed no signs of disintegration in the support it afforded the education of blind children, largely through a fashionable organization called the "Société Philanthropique," many members of which were very shortly to be executed in the Revolution.

Though later Häuy was to go hat in hand to the Revolutionaries in behalf of his blind children, he was not part of the wholesale abandonment of the King when the ill-fated monarch was brought as a captive from Versailles to the Tuileries. With court musicians scarce, Häuy offered, and the King accepted, the services of a blind orchestra in the royal chapel. Thus the music of Häuy's pupils was in the ears of the imprisoned court, desperately planning the disastrous flight to Varennes, which sealed the doom of the monarchy.

When the King had been deposed, Häuy turned to the Constituent Assembly seeking support for his blind pupils. His affairs from then on proceeded in a series of episodes wherein he was chiefly remarkable for over-powering naiveté in attempting to win to his cause factions with murderous intentions toward each other. He suffered arrest as a terrorist for participating in the funeral of Robespierre, while regarded by the Revolutionaries as a truckler to the Bourbons. However, few doubted his continued devotion to the cause of blind children which took him on a kind of Odyssey with his charges through several changes of residence and organization, according to arrangements of unstable governments harassed by the widespread social upheaval.

The order restored by Napoleon offered the most undesirable solution of all, since the children were abruptly ordered to the ancient asylum known as the Quinze-Vingts, which had back of it six hundred years of tradition concerning blindness with which to stand off progress. After a brief period in charge of the pupils housed in that establishment Häuy displeased Napoleon and was dismissed unceremoniously, although later he was given a pension of 2,000 francs. For three years he ran a small private school of his own, after which he was invited by the Emperor Alexander I of Russia to found a school in that country. He undertook this mission and made a stop-over in Berlin, where he found listeners in the King and Queen of Prussia, helping them to choose Dr. Auguste Zeune to head what afterwards proved one of the most successful schools for the blind in Europe. In St. Petersburgh though the Autocrat had expressed a wish to found a school, his entourage managed to stand between him and Häuy, claiming there were no blind people in Russia. After several wasted years on this expedition the Emperor's mother attempted to make amends by putting resources at Häuy's command, but language difficulties and Häuy's failing health produced disappointing asylum-like results, for which ironically he was given the order of St. Vladimir.

Häuy returned to France in 1817. A Bourbon king now reigned again and had been easily persuaded that the school for blind children should be separated from the program for adults, since such had been the case under the old régime. Häuy's school was reconstituted. However, a newly appointed head, Dr. Guillié, while in many ways progressive, and credited with reforms, closed his doors to Häuy because of his association with Revolutionaries.

Häuy wrote to a friend, "I smile to be so looked upon."

He never lost favor with his French pupils and after Dr. Guillié's retirement, a celebration was arranged at the school in Häuy's honor. By this time Louis Braille was among the young students.

Half paralyzed, Häuy was unable to revisit the school in the year of his life which remained.

At this time he wrote, "Ah, if I could but walk, or be dragged even, how joyfully would I go three or four hours each day. . .and neither honor nor fortune would I ask in return."

Häuy has been criticized for lack of administrative skills and firmness. However, it is questionable whether a more uncompromising being could have survived to spread the contagion of his ideas. Having that about him which appeared to be weakness, he, nonetheless, held to a single purpose in life with a tenacity few have equalled.

The terms "Father" and "Apostle of the Blind" have clung to his name.

AN ESSAY ON THE EDUCATION OF BLIND

By Valentin Häuy

(Dedicated to the King of France)
Paris, 1786

TO THE KING OF FRANCE

Sire,

The Protection with which your Majesty honours distinguished Talents ascertains your Claim to their Reverence and Respect. But when their Productions have a Tendency to console the Miseries of suffering Humanity, they have still a more powerful Title to attract the attention of Louis the Beneficent. It was under the influence of Sentiments inspired by a Title so amiable, which is deeply engraven on all the Hearts of France, that I conceived the desire of presenting to your Majesty the Fruits of my Labours; if they have any Value, they will owe it to the double Advantage of appearing under a Patronage so august, and of becoming Vehicles to the Bounty expected from their Sovereign by the Young and unhappy, who have been early deprived of the Benefit of Light with all its numerous and important Resources.

I am,

With the profoundest respect,

Sire,

Your Majesty's most humble,

most obedient

and most faithful subject and Servant,

HÄUY.

PREFACE

AMONGST the unfortunate, who have been deprived, whether from the instant of their birth, or by some early accident in the course of their lives, of that organ which most sensibly contributes to our enjoyment of the delights and advantages arising from society, there have been found some who, by the pregnancy of their genius, and the force and perseverance of its exertions, have found out for themselves certain employments, which they were able to execute, and by these pursuits have proved successful in alleviating the miseries of a situation, in itself so afflicting. Some of them, full of penetration, have enriched their memories with productions of genius, and have imbibed from the charms of conversation or from reading, at which they were happily present, knowledge of a nature and extent which it was impossible for them either to acquire or collect from their own internal resources alone, or from the previous repositories in which it was confined.

Others, endued with a dexterity, which might do honour to the most enlightened artist, have performed mechanical tasks with an exactness, neatness, and symmetry, which could only have been expected from hands informed and regulated by the advantage of sight. But in spite of these happy dispositions in the blind, these marvellous exhibitions, which ought rather to be called prodigies, than natural events, could only be, in the persons by whom they were displayed, the slow results of indefatigable industry and obstinate application, and seemed alone to have been reserved for a small number amongst them, who were peculiarly prerogatived by nature, whilst the rest of their brethren appeared consigned by destiny to idleness, languor and dependence, without a possibility of escaping from a durance so horrible in its nature, and so permanent in its continuance. Thus with respect to all social utility and importance, people in these unhappy circumstances were to be accounted dead members, even in those societies where their existence was protracted, and its exigencies supplied; and the most part of them victims at once to the double calamity of blindness and indigence, had no other portion assigned them but the miserable and sterile resource of begging, for protracting, if we may so speak, in the horrors of a dungeon the moments of a painful and burdensome existence.

It is to be essentially serviceable to this class of suffering mortals that I have invented a General Plan of Institution, which, by principles and utensils proper for their use, might facilitate to some of these what they could not otherwise accomplish, without almost insuperable difficulty, and render practicable to others, what it appeared impossible for them to execute. I felt the difficulty of this enterprise in its full extent, that it was too arduous to be performed by myself alone; I have therefore been assiduous in my researches for support and assistance. Beneficent characters have, on all hands, exerted themselves with ardour, that they might co-operate in promoting this labour of love. They have laid the foundation of a fabric whose structure will at once reflect honour on their own hearts and on the age which their lives adorn. Each of them indeed, with a laudable emulation, seems to have disputed with me for the cordial pleasure of perfecting and finishing a monument so congenial and so grateful to humanity; and I confess it with delight, if it was permitted to any to claim an honour from such an undertaking, it is they more than any one else, who have a just claim to that honour. I shall therefore avoid,

in the sequel of this work, every expression which may seem to imply any design of appropriating that merit to myself; and I shall there speak only in the person of those who have insured their unalienable right to my gratitude, whether they have contributed to the maturity of this plan by the exertions of their understanding, or by any other means.

CHAPTER I

The Intention of this Plan.

BEFORE we give an account of the motives of our institution, let us be permitted to say a few words on that readiness which we declare ourselves to possess, not only to answer all the objections which may be urged against us, but even to enter into a minute detail of all the circumstances, whose solution the public have a right to expect from us. Though there is scarcely any invention which has not, by its novelty, excited the clamour of envy and of ignorance, we are bold enough to flatter ourselves that our plan has nothing to fear from the malignity of their attacks. The nature of our design, the wisdom of the age in which we live, the humanity of our countrymen—all these circumstances conspire to assure us that we shall only have to resolve, in the sequel of this work, such difficulties as may be proposed by a wise and well-intended criticism; a criticism rather designed to favour our attempts than to discourage us in their prosecution. It is with this hope that we are determined to answer every objection which shall appear to us, either as lying against the motives or plan of cultivation, which we have proposed for the blind. We will do more; we will endeavour to dissipate in the imagination of our readers every prepossession, even in our favour, which may deceive those who have not been present at our probationary exhibitions, and to whom the too zealous partisans of our plan may have represented as marvellous and unaccountable, such circumstances as are its natural and proper effects. In offering thus a faithful delineation of our method, considered in its proper point of view, it is our intention to leave no impressions on the minds of the public with respect to our establishment, but such real and just ideas as they ought to entertain: to teach the blind reading, by the assistance of books, where the letters are rendered palpable by their elevation above the surface of the paper, and by means of this reading to instruct them in the art of printing, of writing, of arithmetic, the languages, history, geography, mathematics, music, &c., to put in the hands of these unfortunate people such arts and occupations as are merely mechanical; spinning, for instance, knitting, bookbinding, &c. From such an institution two objects are in view, both of which benevolent men will own to be of importance.

First, to employ those among them who are in easy circumstances in an agreeable manner. Secondly, to rescue from the miseries of beggary those to whom fortune has been parsimonious of her favours, by putting the means of subsistence in their power; and, in short, to render useful to society their hands, as well as those of their guides.

Such is the end pursued by our institutions.

CHAPTER II

Answer to the Objection against the Utility of this Plan.

THE public has done us the justice unanimously to agree that we have accomplished the first object of our institution in presenting an amusement to the blind who share the bounties of fortune, and if any doubt have arisen it can only be concerning the possibility of realising the hopes which we have given of blending in our establishment the useful with the agreeable. "In teaching

your blind," say the objectors, "all the parts of education which you propose, can you have conceived the project of peopling the republic of letters and arts with men of learning, professors, and artists, each of whom, though blind, shall be capable of making a distinguished figure in these conspicuous departments, or can they even be certain of deriving the means of subsistence each from the labours of his own vocation?" No, we never pretend that those of the blind who even discover the most shining parts shall enter into competition, either in the liberal sciences or mechanical arts, with scholars or artisans who are blessed with the use of sight, even when their talents rise not above mediocrity; but when any or all of these provinces are not properly supplied with persons who to the advantage of sight add professional abilities, the blind may then exert their powers, whether natural or acquired, as well in promoting private as public utility; and in this view it requires no mighty effort of courage to recommend them to the public benevolence and attention; and though their talents should not be sufficient to pre-engage the general taste in their favour, or the necessity of employing them, so considerable as to open a resource for their exigencies, yet the force of humanity alone may be adequate to produce an effect so desirable. How often have we already seen beneficence ingenious in prescribing tasks to these unhappy labourers, that it might have an opportunity of supplying their indigence without wounding their delicacy. This is what at first occurs as an answer to the objection urged against the general utility of our plan, till our readers be convinced by a detail of this work, and still more effectually by experience, to what degree our scheme of education may be carried, and how essentially it may contribute to the subsistence of those among the blind who are born in the depth of want and obscurity.

CHAPTER III

Of Reading, as adapted to the Practice of the Blind.

READING is the only method of adorning the memory, so that it may command the stores which it has imbibed with facility, promptitude, and method. It is, as it were, the channel through which every different kind of knowledge is communicated to us. Without this medium literary productions could form nothing in the human mind but a confused heap of disarranged and fluctuating ideas. To teach the blind, therefore, to read, and to form a library proper for their use, must constitute the object of our first care. Before our time various but ineffectual experiments had been tried; sometimes by the assistance of characters moving upon a board and raised above its surface (a); at other times by the use of letters formed upon paper with the puncture of a pin (b), the principles or elementary characters of reading had been rendered obvious to the perception of the blind. Already had the wonders of the art of writing, which before had appeared chimerical, been realised. Already, under their touch, which was now found a substitute for vision, had the conceptions of the blind assumed a body. But these gross and imperfect utensils only presented to the blind the possibility of attaining and enjoying the pleasures and advantages of reading without affording them the proper means for acquiring them. We had no difficulty in exploring them; their principles had existed for a long time, and were daily exhibited to our eyes. We had observed that a printed leaf issuing from the press presented to the eye, on the contrary side, the letters higher than its surface, but reversed both in their position and in their order.

We ordered typographical characters to be cast of the form in which their impression strikes our eyes, and by applying to these a paper wet, as the printers do, we produced the first exemplar which had till then appeared of letters whose elevation renders them obvious to the touch without the intervention of sight. Such was the origin of a library for the use of the blind.

After having successively employed characters of different sizes, according as we found the touch of our pupils more or less delicate and susceptible, it appeared proper to us, at least during the first periods of our progress, to confine ourselves to that type which has been used in printing the greatest part of this work. This character appears to us as a proper medium amongst those which can be felt and distinguished by different individuals who are deprived of sight, according to the various degrees of tactile nicety with which nature has endued them; or at least according to the degrees of sensibility which diversities of age or occupation may have left them. It will be easily conceived, that when these means are found, there is no more difficulty in teaching a blind person the principles of reading, than in teaching one, whose visual powers are in their highest perfection, and that the blind may pass by an easy transition from the perception of typographical to that of written characters. We do not here speak of characters written in the manner of those who see; for all our endeavours to form characters rising to the touch by the assistance of ink have proved abortive. We have therefore substituted in their place impressions made upon strong paper, with an iron pen, whose point is not slit.

It is unnecessary to mention, that in writing to the blind we do not make use of ink, that the character is deeply impressed, distinctly separated, a little larger than common, and nearly of the same kind with those now in the hands of our reader; that, in short, we never write but on the side of the paper contrary to that which is read, and in such a manner that the position and order of the letters may appear proper when the page is turned. These precautions being scrupulously observed, the blind may read tolerably letters from their correspondents who see, those formed by their own hands, or by the hands of others in similar circumstances (c). They will do more, they will equally distinguish, on the same paper, musical characters and others rendered sensible by our method of procedure, as we shall immediately shew in the sequel.

CHAPTER IV

Answer to various Objections against the Method of Reading proposed for the Blind.

1. "THE elevation of your characters will doubtless be very soon "depressed," says an objector, "and of consequence no longer perceptible to the blind by touch." No person is ignorant of the acuteness of that sense in several individuals, who from their infancy have been obliged to use it, in order to supply the want of that which nature has denied them. A surface which appears the smoothest to our eye, presents to the fingers of the blind inequalities which escape the notice of that organ, though by its assistance those who see exult in being able to perceive the remotest stars that adorn the spacious concave of heaven; and when our pupils distinguish a typographical character by feeling, which may elude even a microscopic eye, when between the thickness of two given objects, if the one differs from the other only by the fourth part

of a French line, they can clearly perceive that difference; when, in short, they read a series of words, after the elevation of the letters is depressed, what have we to fear from the frequent use of their books, except the absolute destruction of the volumes themselves, a misfortune to which those who see are equally liable?

2. "Your books," it is objected, "are too voluminous. You swell a 12mo to the enormous and unwieldy size of a folio; and by thus altering its convenient form, you render it less portable and useful." We might satisfy ourselves with answering to this objection that our art of printing is yet in its infancy, but progressive, and may perhaps one day become perfect, as that which is obvious to the sight has already done; that it may likewise have its Elzevirs, its Barbous, its Peters, its Didot, &c. And since its commencement, how many and how important are the obligations which it already owes to M. Clousier, printer to the King, who assists us by his advice with as much zeal as disinterestedness.

We add that during the interval between its present and its more perfect state we are employed in adapting a method of epitomising, which will considerably diminish the size of our volumes. Of this we hope to give the first specimen in a work which will be immediately printed after this is finished (d). Besides, we will make a selection of authors, nor shall any one enter into our press but such works as by their reputation have merited that distinction; so that on one hand, if by the magnitude of our characters we enlarge our volumes, on the other we shall lessen them by a judicious abridgement; and perhaps one day the library of the blind may become the library of taste and learning.

3. "But confess, then, that your blind scholars read slowly, and that the spirit of the most animated composition will evaporate beneath their fingers, while the words are languidly pronounced without energy and without emotion." Our pupils, it is true, read in slow succession; besides the little practice, which an institution so lately begun allows them in reading, they have the disadvantage of only perceiving one letter at once, as readers who see themselves must do, were their eyes obliged to traverse an opening between each letter equal to the space occupied by one typographical character in this work.

But we hope that after frequent practice in reading and in making use of the abbreviations we have mentioned above, our blind pupils will proceed with greater quickness. Besides, we have never entertained the ambition of qualifying them to be readers for princes, or to declaim in public with all the graces of oratory. Let them only, by means of reading, learn the elements of science; let them find in this exercise an effectual remedy against that intolerable melancholy which corporeal darkness and mental inactivity united in the same person are too apt to produce; these ends attained, will fully accomplish our wishes.

4. "But what good purpose will it serve to teach the blind the letters? Why instruct them in the art of printing books for their peculiar use? They never will be able to read ours. And, from the knowledge which they will acquire by reading, will any considerable advantage result to society?"

Permit us, in our turn, to ask you, To what purpose is it that books are printed amongst all the people who surround us, and exclusively intended for the peculiar use of each? Do you read the language of the Chinese, that of

Malabar, or of Turkey? Can you interpret the Peruvian Quipos, and so many other tongues indispensably necessary to those who understand them? Should you then be transported to China, to the Banks of the Ganges, to the Ottoman Empire, or to Peru, you will there be precisely in the same predicament with one of our blind pupils. With regard to the utility which the knowledge of a blind man in reading may produce to society, without deviating from the sentiment expressed near the end of the following page of this work, we may with pleasure appeal for its reality to the experiment so often repeated under our own eyes, and of which the public itself has been a witness in our exhibitions; we mean the experiment of a blind child teaching one who saw to read (e). We appeal for its reality to the example of the blind person at Puiseaux (f). We appeal to you, in short, ye tender and respectable parents, born to a liberal share of fortune's favours, whose son is just entered into the world, but shall never see the light of heaven; what a sensible satisfaction it is to us to find ourselves in a capacity to alleviate the transports of your grief. Yes, our plan of education bids fair on one hand to restore to your son, already tenderly loved, the dearest prerogative of intellectual existence; on the other to furnish you with the means of gratifying those desires with which your taste for learning and genius inspires you, to procure him an education worthy of a child born in a distinguished rank. And you men of learning, who enlighten us by your exertion of corporeal sight, if the fatigues of unremitted labour for our instruction should one day extinguish that organ, permit us at that unhappy crisis to offer you the means at once of continuing the benefit of your lessons to us, and to you the enjoyment of an advantage of which they are in some measure the agreeable fruits. Homer, Belisarius, and Milton, afflicted with blindness, would with pleasure have consecrated to the service of their country those years of their lives which followed that catastrophe.

CHAPTER V

Of the Art of Printing, as practised by the Blind for their peculiar Use.

THE analogy which the manner of reading adapted to the blind has with their method of printing, having reduced us to the necessity of giving by anticipation, in detail, some circumstances which relate to the origin of their art of printing, it remains for us to explain the principal operations of that art, as adapted to their practice. It will be much the same case with respect to the mechanical operations of printing among the blind as with those who see. It is doubtless impossible for every individual to have an exclusive possession of it (g). The necessity of habitually knowing and practising the different branches of that art, the multiplicity and high price of the utensils requisite for its execution, the civil privileges with which its professors must be endued, all these conspiring obstacles limit its pursuit to a society of the blind, solely formed and intended for its practice. It is in our academy for their education where we hope to constitute the chief place (if we may use the expression), from whence will issue such typographical productions, for instance, as are proper for the use of all the blind who, in their misfortune, shall have the sweet consolation of being born within the dominions of our Monarch (h). Let us proceed to the manner in which our blind pupils perform their typographical labours. We have given to their cases the order of the alphabet, so as to preserve, immediately under their hands, the characters which they shall have most frequent occasion to use. We preferred that distribution under the apprehension

that the blind would be less clever than we have really found them. It is upon the same principle that we make them set their types in a case lined with a copper bottom, and pierced with several lines of small holes, from whence, by the assistance of a pointed instrument, they bring out the types which are to be changed. It is upon the same principle that we cause to be adjusted, in the inside of these cases, iron rulers (moveable by means of their screws), one at the side and the other at the bottom of the page, to keep the lines in it regular. It is, in short, upon the same principle that we raise these cases horizontally in longitude upon four feet, of which the two that support the upper end of the page are one-half lower than those upon which the under end rests; so that without making use of a composing stick the blind compositor may place the words at proper distances, and that they may not be inverted whilst he is composing the remainder of the page.

The way in which the typographical characters of the blind present themselves naturally indicates that the arrangement ought to be made from left to right, as we have observed chap. 3d. And in order to make reading easy to the blind, at least in the first periods of their education, it may prove a happy expedient to leave spaces between the words, and even sometimes between the letters. It is easy to see that when one prints in relievo he cannot print on the other side without being in danger of destroying the former impression, by tracing which with their finger only the blind can read. Likewise, for preserving the pages in the same order that they have in books for the use of those who see, the blind are obliged to paste together, back to back, by their extremities, the four pages of a sheet coming from the press; and then the arrangement of the cases is made in an order different from that of persons who see. Thus the leaves being pasted, they form them into books, by simply stitching and covering them with pasteboard without beating them.

The office of the ordinary printing-press is easily done, by help of a cylindrical press, which is moved by a lever from one extremity to the other, along two bars of iron, between which are placed the forms, or pages that are set, after the manner of printers (i).

We may employ with success the same process for printing in relievo for the use of the blind, musical characters, geographical maps, the principal strokes of designing, and, in general, of all the figures of which the knowledge may be obtained by means of touch. It is upon account of these last objects, above all, that we hope the admirable discovery of M. M. Hoffman will be precious to the blind; we share by anticipation their sentiments of gratitude towards those estimable artists (k).

To the press of which we have spoken a little above we have thought it proper to add a kind of tympanum, by the assistance of which the blind may, at their pleasure, tinge with black, copies of an edition perfectly similar to those which they print on white paper for their own private use.

This procedure, which is equally applicable to music, to geographical maps, or to designs, &c., puts the blind artist in a capacity not only of giving an account to himself of all the productions which he wishes to convey to those who see, but likewise easily to direct their studies by the similarity of copies, on the supposition of his being employed to give them lessons.

CHAPTER VI

On the Art of Printing, as practised by the Blind for the Use of those who See.

IF we have been happy enough to discover the means of rendering printing useful to the blind for their own use; if it is to us that they owe the advantage of henceforth possessing libraries, and of taking from books formed on purpose for themselves, notions of letters, of languages, of history, of geography, of mathematics, of music, &c.; we are not the first who dared to try to make them impress their ideas upon paper by help of typographical characters. We have seen in the hands of Mademoiselle Paradis (l) a letter printed by her in the character called Pica, and in the German language, full of sentiments the most delicate, as well as the best expressed. This attempt gave birth in my mind to the idea of applying the blind to the art of printing for the use of those who see; it has succeeded with us in every kind of work, whether with large or common types, as one may judge by the different specimens which they have exhibited, and which are to be found at the end of this work, if they can possibly be procured.

After our manner of proceeding, the blind, formed according to our institution, compose a typographical plate in imitation of these models, with so much more ease as they are almost continually of the same form; it suffices to write for them the subject with a pen of iron, of which the top is not split, or with the handle of a penknife as we have shewn above in the 3d Chapter.

After having exercised the blind upon the different branches of the art of printing in the manner of those who see, there are found few kinds in which they have not succeeded. We have seen them successively compose, adjust, impress, moisten the paper, touch it, print, &c., &c. (m) We appeal, besides, to competent judges in that affair, and we refer our reader to the report of M. M., the printers, which agrees with that of the Academy of Sciences.

CHAPTER VII

Of Writing

THE example of Bernouilli, who had taught a young blind girl to write, and that of M. Weissenbourg, who, deprived of sight from seven years of age has procured for himself the advantages of fixing also his ideas upon paper by writing, have encouraged us to try the means of putting the pen into the hands of our pupils. But always occupied in our real point of view, that is to say, in rendering our institution in every respect useful to those individuals who were its objects, we have thought that it could not but be curious to cause the blind to write, if they could arrive at reading their own hand; this is what engaged us in causing to be made for their use a pen of iron, the top of which was not split, and with which writing without ink, and supported with a strong paper, they produce upon it a character in relievo which they can afterwards read, in passing their fingers along the elevated lines on the back of the page. This elevation, however slight it may appear, is always sufficient, especially if care is taken to place below the paper upon which the blind write a soft and yielding surface, such as several leaves of waste paper, of pasteboard, or of leather. With respect to the proper mechanism of teaching the art of writing

to those who are born blind, it is by no means difficult to be executed; you have only to teach your pupil to trace, with a pointed instrument, the characters ranged in form of lines. But instead of directing the process of this pointed instrument by means of characters in relievo, as M. Weissenbourg has done, it is better to conduct it by letters graven hollow on some plate of metal. We have besides this precaution taken that of giving our printed letters the form of written, in order early to accustom the blind pupil to catch the resemblance. At last, when he has acquired the habit of distinguishing their forms, there remains nothing more for him to write straight but to place upon his paper a frame internally furnished with small rising lines, parallel to the direction of the writing, and distant from one another about nine-tenths of an inch. These parallel lines serve to direct his hand, whilst he transports it from left to right, in order to trace the characters.

CHAPTER VIII

Of Arithmetic

WE have admired the ingenious tables of Saunderson (n) and those of M. Weissenbourg (o); the reason why we have adopted neither of these methods was from another view, viz., that we might preserve, without interruption, the strictest analogy possible between the means of educating the blind and those who see, we have thought that the manner of these last ought to be preferred. Likewise, when our pupils calculate, one may follow their operations step by step.

We have caused to be made for them to this end, a board pierced with different lines of square holes, proper for receiving moveable figures and bars for separating the different parts of an operation.

We have added, to render this board more useful, a case composed of four rows of little boxes, containing all the figures proper for calculation, and which are placed at the right hand of the blind person while he operates. The only difficulty which occurred was to represent all the possible fractions without multiplying the characters which express them. We have thought of causing to be cast 10 simple denominators in the order of the figures 0, 1, 2, &c., even to 9 inclusively; and likewise 10 simple numerators in the same order, moveable in order to be adapted at the head of the denominators. By means of this combination, there is not a fraction which our pupils cannot express.

One may see from what has been said, that our method has a double advantage.

1. A father of a family, or a tutor, can easily direct a blind child in the study of arithmetic.

2. This blind child, when once instructed, may also conduct, in his turn, the arithmetical operations performed by a child who sees.

The blind have, besides, so great a propensity for calculation that we have often seen them following an arithmetical process and correcting its errors by memory alone.

CHAPTER IX

Of Geography

WE owe to Madame Paradis the knowledge of geographical maps for the use of the blind. She herself had it from M. Weissenbourg; but we are astonished that neither the one nor the other has carried to a higher degree of perfection, the utensils which contribute to the study of that science.

They mark the circumference of countries by a tenacious and viscid matter, covering the different parts of their maps with a kind of sand mixed with glass, in various manners, and distinguish the order of towns by grains of glass of a greater or lesser size.

We are satisfied with marking the limits in our maps for the use of the blind, by small iron wire rounded; and it is always a difference either in the form or size of every part of a map, which assists our pupils in distinguishing the one from the other.

These means we have chosen in preference, on account of the ease which they afford us of multiplying, by the assistance of the press, the copies of our original maps for the use of the blind. It will, besides, be more apt than any other to offer itself to the execution of details the most delicate which can affect the touch of these individuals; and the first of our pupils have brought themselves to such admirable perfection in the use of geographical maps, that people see them with surprise, at our exhibitions, distinguish a kingdom, a province, an island, the impression of which is presented to them, independent of other parts of a map, upon a square piece of paper.

CHAPTER X

Of Music

IN tracing the plan of the education of the blind, we have at first looked upon music only as an appendage fit for relaxing them after their labour. But the natural propensity in the greatest number of the blind for this art; the resources which it can furnish to several among them for their sustenance; the interest with which it inspires those who deign to be present at our exhibitions, have all forced us to sacrifice our own opinion to the general utility.

The blind have natural propensities for this art. A considerable number of them, deprived of the means of living, seize with eagerness, through necessity, an employment towards which their inclination had already so powerfully attracted them. It is only the want of instruction, without doubt, which reduces some of them to the necessity of wandering in the streets, from door to door, grating the ear by the aid of an ill-tuned instrument, or a hoarse voice that they may extort an inconsiderable piece of money, which is frequently given them with an injunction to be silent (p).

Others less unfortunate, and giving themselves up by choice to an instrument which affords them more resource, follow the career of Couperin, of Balbatre, of Sejan, of Miroir, of Carpentiers (q).

Our institution will furnish all of them with assistance, whether in the study or practice of their art. Before our time, teachers of the blind were obliged to make them comprehend, by playing them over and over, the small pieces of music which they wished to execute. We have caused to be cast musical characters proper to represent upon paper all its possible varieties, by elevations on its surface in the manner of those which we have devised to represent words (r).

By the assistance of our printed music, then the blind pupil may learn at present the principles of that art, and impress on his memory the different pieces of music with which he wishes to enrich it (s).

He may likewise form to himself a library of taste, composed of the most enchanting musical productions; and in short he himself may transmit to us the fruits of his own genius (t).

With respect to the music introduced into our particular exhibitions, we beg of our readers only to consider it as a decent recreation, which we have seen ourselves obliged to grant to our pupils. Our institution is, in its origin, a kind of workhouse, the different artists and labourers of which amuse their toils from time to time with harmony. And we have, with less reluctance, permitted them to execute some little pieces, even in their public exercises, that the most part of the beneficent people, who have deigned to be present at them, have shown the most lively and sensible compassion on hearing their performances.

CHAPTER XI

Of the Occupations relative to Manual Employments, or Handicrafts.

BEFORE the birth of our institution, some of the blind, doubtless fatigued with that wretched inactivity to which their deplorable situation seemed to condemn them, made efforts to shake it off. (u) Convinced of their fitness for several manual employments, we had no other anxiety but that of selecting such tasks as were proper for them. We applied them with success to spinning. (x) Of the thread which they spun we succeeded in making them twist pack-thread, and of this pack-thread we made them weave girths. Their labours at the Boisseau (y) in making small walking staves of cords, in the working of nets, in sewing, in binding books, all were tried to our satisfaction; and we wanted labourers rather than work; so many are the kinds of manual employment, which one may trust to the unfortunate persons who are deprived of the pleasure of sight.

After these first trials, we will neglect nothing to put early into the hands of a blind child, born of indigent parents, an occupation from which he may one day draw his sustenance. We will thus extirpate the inclination to beggary; and we will finish (if the expression may be allowed us) by grouping our picture, as well as by giving animation to the individual figures it contains.

CHAPTER XII

Of the Manner of Instructing the Blind, and a Parallel of their Education with that of the Deaf and Dumb.

AS we have principally attached ourselves to simplify the means and the utensils proper for the instruction of the Blind, we flatter ourselves we have placed their education within the reach and compass of all the world. This operation, besides that it is easy in itself, requires more courage than knowledge in a master. We believe then, that upon this subject we have no particular advice to give.

By the aid of our books in relievo, every one can teach them to read. Upon the musical works formed in our press every professor of that art may give them lessons. With an iron pen, with plates and moveable characters, executed according to our models, the first masters in writing may teach them that art and arithmetic. In short, there wants nothing but maps in relievo to direct their studies in Geography; and so of other things (y).

We cannot conclude this reflection on the degrees of facility with which the blind may be educated, without drawing a parallel between it and the method of educating the deaf and dumb. However surprising to the eyes of the public the result of our procedure may appear, we are very far from implicitly joining in that rash admiration of some persons who are very willing to give this result a preference to the art of instructing the deaf and dumb: an art, we dare say, incredible to those who have never been witnesses of the success to which it has been conducted by the virtuous ecclesiastic, who is its original author; and with regard to which, several, even of those who have seen the proofs of this art, neither know how to estimate its merit or to feel its difficulties. Let any person in reality follow them step by step; let him take the Abbé in the first instant of time, when he begins to wish to make his first signs understood by his pupil. Let such a one explain to us by what enchanting and magical talents he teaches the deaf to distinguish the moods of a verb; its tenses, and the inflections of its persons. How will one tell us in what manner he insinuates into their minds metaphysical ideas? By what marvellous secret he makes himself understood by the motion of his lips alone, and maintains a kind of conversation with them, extremely expressive, quite silent as it is; and it will be agreed, that the talent of impressing the soul with new ideas, in speaking to the eyes alone, by gesticulations infinitely more eloquent than those of all our orators, is much superior to the talent of awaking in the soul ideas which are already engraven on it, by causing to concur with the impression of the voice, upon the organ of hearing, the delicacy of a touch exercised in seizing the nicest elevations on the surface of a paper. It is a long time since we have been anxious to pay this tribute to M. l'Abbé de l'Epée; we congratulate ourselves on having this task to perform in such favourable circumstances, and we flatter ourselves that our readers will feel all the justice of the deference we pay him (z).

CHAPTER XIII

Of Languages, History, Mathematics, &c.

IT is chiefly for the study of all these objects, that the books which we have invented for the use of the blind, will be to them of immense utility.

Elementary works of languages, of mathematics, of history, &c., will be in reality the first foundation of their library. Those which they can produce themselves, and which shall merit the public approbation, will be justly entitled to a place there (aa).

We will take particular care to join in their library works equally fitted to form the heart and cultivate the mind of our blind pupil, in fixing, as the basis of these studies, the most essential of all studies—that of religion. By the assistance of such principles, we will inculate the love of his duty, and in particular, gratitude towards his benefactors. In enlivening his days by the interesting details of history, we will cause him to know the French, among whom he will congratulate himself on having received his existence. We will engrave upon his memory the principal facts of their history, and the marks of beneficence and humanity which are mixt with the relation of their achievements. We will cause him, above all, to remark that, in every period of time, the French have distinguished themselves by an inviolable attachment to their Kings. From the faithful picture which we will draw to him of a Monarch, who, formed by himself to inspire that attachment, includes in his equity and beneficence all the particular motives which can add to the energy of this hereditary sentiment, he will feel, as we do, that the most desirable state to which a nation can arrive, is that where the submission of several millions of people towards a common master, presents itself under the image of the respectful tenderness of a large family towards a father who constitutes its happiness.

FOOTNOTES

(a) It is without doubt, by these means that the blind man of Puiseaux, of whom M. Diderot speaks in his letter on the blind, taught his son to read.

(b) We have seen some words thus marked by punctures upon cards in the hands of Mlle. Paradis. This virtuosa is 20 years of age; she was born in Vienna in Austria, the place of her ordinary residence. A kind of apoplexy deprived her suddenly of her sight, at the age of two years. She has principally applied herself to music, and constituted in 1784, at Paris, the chief pleasures of the spiritual concert.

(c) M. Weissenbourg, a boy dwelling at Manheim, having become blind between the seventh and eighth year of his age, celebrated for the knowledge which he has acquired, has preserved the faculty of writing; but this advantage, which is only an object of curiosity, will become of real utility, if, as we hope, he adopts our method.

(d) Examples of these abbreviations, within the capacity and reach of all readers, are in the Treatises of Philosophy, in the Dictionaries, the new Methods and other Elementary Books of Education.

(e) According to the proposal made in advertisements, annunciations and various intimations on the 3rd of December, 1786, page 3204, in the first article of demands, on the 5th of the same month we caused one of our blind to begin teaching a child who saw, to read. During the lessons, the master had beneath his fingers a white book printed in relievo for the blind, whilst the other had under his eyes the same edition in black. This child gave, for the first time, proofs of his advancement in the exercises performed by the blind at Versailles, during the Christmas holidays in the same year.

(f) This blind person, as we have said before, Note (a), gave to his son lessons in reading.

(g) One knows how easy it is to abuse printing in all respects; and not satisfied with the rectitude of our intentions, and the indulgence with which people have honoured our infant printing, the productions of which bear a character of originality easily distinguishable, we have formed to ourselves an inviolable rule not to suffer anything printed to issue from us without the sanction of M. Clousier, printer to the King, and which has not been executed under his eyes, or those of some person commissioned by him.

(h) Till establishments similar to ours be formed in other nations, it will be a pleasure to us to cause to be printed in relievo, and in other languages, by our blind pupils, books destined for the use of strangers who are deprived of sight.

(i) This press is the invention of Sieur Beaucher, chief lock-smith. It has amply and successfully accomplished our wishes, as to the facility with which it is managed without any great effort by a blind child, and by which it admits the mechanism which we have adapted to it. We believe, however, that a perpendicular pressure given to the whole leaf at the same instant, will leave behind it a more solid impression; we hope to find this in a press of another kind, which the Sieur Beaucher has described to us.

(k) Although in pages of this work we have not repeated the names of some of the distinguished printers whom we have heard celebrated, we cannot forbear to confess that according to our manner of thinking, there are many others who appear to us to exercise their employment with éclat. We even perceive, in those who compose the body of this society, a general emulation. And obliged, by the nature of our institution, to serve a kind of apprenticeship to this art, we would quote with pleasure a considerable number of well-known productions from different presses which leave no further improvement to be wished; as well for the neatness of the characters, as for the choice of paper, and which have served us as models in the study of printing which we had to go through. Besides, far from erecting ourselves as judges in opposition to persons who cultivate the arts and sciences, whether from situation or taste, we praise even attempts that have not been crowned with success. — See Translation published with "Blacklock's Poems."

(l) This production was executed by the assistance of a little press, which M. de Kempellan, the inventor of the automatic chess-player, had formed for her.

(m) If there is any operation among the blind which requires to be directed by those who see, it is printing for the use of these last we acknowledge. This speculation has been often repeated to us upon other different branches of our institution. But have not clear-sighted persons who labour at the press themselves need of a guide to whose skill they are obliged to pay deference? And in the other states of life do we not see persons more enlightened, directing those who are less, whilst those are in a situation to conduct people less experienced than they? 'Tis thus that, in the day of battle, the general of an army gives order, the intention of which his subaltern officers are ignorant. It is thus that the pilot conducts to the end of their voyage the learned academicians, who are unskilled in the art of navigation.

(n) The arithmetical table of Saunderson was formed of a board divided into small squares placed horizontally and separated one from the other at equal distances; each little square was pierced with nine holes, viz., one on the midst of each side. It was by the different positions of the pegs uniformly placed in different holes that Saunderson could express any kind of number.

(o) We have seen, in the hands of Mlle. Paradis, arithmetical tables which we believe to have been those of M. Weissenbourg. But without a particular study, one cannot follow the operations which are performed by the help of these tables. We do not know if our pupil could operate with equal swiftness and certainty by these means as he could by those of persons who see, and we have no other merit but that of rendering them palpable to him.

(p) If the taste and inclination which certain blind persons have shown for the violin, or for such instruments as can easily be joined with it, were directed by art, perhaps they might make use of it for gaining more decently their livelihood. An estimable citizen,* who approves of all the parts of our institution, without discovering for any of them a particular predilection, suggested to us in the course of one of our exhibitions, that one might usefully employ in the training of blind musicians at festivals.

(q) All the world knows the merit of Mr. Chauvet, blind organist of Notre Dame de Bonne-Nouvelle. They quote in France several other blind people whose talents ascertain the utility of this study for our pupils. How comfortable for us will it be one day to have extracted from this art of harmony the means of subsistence for a part of these unfortunate people, and to have seen them become, by a happy choice, the instruments of beneficence.

(r) It has been objected to us with propriety, that our blind pupils cannot execute and feel the musical characters at the same time, which people who see call performing at sight, but this never was the end which we proposed. What matters it though they perform a piece of music by heart, provided they perform it correctly and faithfully.

(s) No person is ignorant how faithful and sure are the memories of the blind, and with what readiness they furnish them. It is likewise known what a clear conception the greatest number of them discover in difficult operations of mind; talents so astonishing, that one would almost doubt whether nature was more parsimonious in her gifts with respect to them, or anxious to recompense them for those which she has refused.

(t) Mlle. Paradis, who was employed in the study of composition during her continuance in Paris, and who then sought the means of figuring the chords, learned with pleasure that we were making trials on the same subject. We regret that her abrupt departure to go and reap, under another climate, the fruits of her talents, did not leave us time to offer her the result of our procedures, to assist her in fixing upon paper the matter of her study.

(u) Amongst the blind who, not having the advantage of enjoying the pension of Quinze-Vingts, are obliged to ask their livelihood in the capital, we have seen several who occupied themselves in employments relative to handicrafts. The number of these which we can make the blind exercise in our workhouses is very considerable; and we are not afraid to assert, that, if we continue to be favoured, we shall arrive one day at placing all the blind under shelter from indigence by employing them advantageously.

(x) Blind children, who are under instruction in the house of our institution, spin by the assistance of the ingenious machine invented by the Sr. Hildebrand, a mechanic. One among them turns a principal wheel which gives to several smaller wheels a motion which each spinner can stop, quicken or retard, at his pleasure, without disturbing the general order.

(v) The translator takes here the liberty of retaining the original French word, not being able to find an English name for the same utensil. Boisseau properly signifies a bushel, but likewise means an instrument of timber, of a semiglobular form, and about one foot and a half in length, very light, which is placed upon the knee for working. They make use of it in plaiting small round cord, or working girdles of silk, or other works which they call done with the boisseau, to distinguish them from those which are made upon frames.

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*Mr. Thierry, Author of the Traveller's Almanack.

(y) We will take pleasure in directing the construction of utensils useful for the instruction of the blind who are strangers. The books and works of music shall be furnished by our blind pupils, and sold for their benefit alone. When we shall have put the last hand to the objects which demand our chief care, we hope to employ ourselves in their amusements, and in everything which can form a decent and innocent recreation for the blind. We believe that it ought equally to enter into our views to teach blind children to walk alone, and without a guide.

(z) We speak with so much more knowledge of the cause of instructing the deaf and dumb; and our opinion is so much more agreeable to truth that obliged, by circumstances from which we could extricate ourselves, to consecrate the leisure which the instruction of the blind left us to that of a young man found upon the coast of Normandy, who is deaf and almost dumb, we have felt in every step how difficult the enterprise was, beyond reach of our powers, and a task alone for M. l'Abbé de l'Epée. We propose to ourselves to give the history of this unfortunate young man. The composition of it shall be done by him, and the print by blind children. The whole shall be introduced by proposals for subscription; the benefits arising from which shall be divided into two equal parts, and given one half to the blind children, and the other to that unfortunate young man.

(aa) It was certainly a desirable and happy thing for Saunderson, author of various productions, to commit them himself to paper, and without being obliged to depend on the fidelity of a Secretary, to be able at every instant to render himself an exact account.

One of our pupils shewing a disposition to poetry, we beg of our readers to permit us to encourage it in subjoining a specimen of his rising talent, after the models of different works in printing, which can be executed by the blind, and which are at the end of this volume.

AN HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF THE

Rise, the Progress, and the Actual State of the Institution of the Blind Children.

Many respectable persons have carried the concern which they felt for our institution, even to demand how such an idea could possibly enter into our mind; by what means we attempted the execution of it; and by what degrees it advanced to the point in which it is at present. Anxious to satisfy a curiosity so laudable, we are eager to subjoin here a concise narrative of the rise, progress, and actual state of our establishment.

A novelty of a kind so singular has attracted for several years the united attention of a number of persons at the entry of one of those places of refreshment situated in the public walks whither respectable citizens go to relax themselves about the decline of day.

Eight or ten poor blind persons, with spectacles on their noses, placed along a desk which sustained instruments of music, where they executed a discordant symphony, seemed to give delight to the audience. A very different sentiment possessed our soul, and we conceived, at that very instant, the possibility of realizing, to the advantage of those unfortunate people, the means of which they had only an apparent and ridiculous enjoyment: the blind, said we to ourselves, do they not know objects by the diversity of their forms? Are they mistaken in the value of a piece of money? Why can they not distinguish a C from G in music, or an *a* from an *f* in orthography, if their characters were rendered plain?

We reflected sometimes on the utility of this undertaking; there another observation came to strike us. A young child, full of understanding, but deprived of sight, listened, with advantage, to correct the errors of his brother in reading. He even frequently besought him to read his elementary books to him. He, more employed in objects of amusement, shut his ears to the solicitations of his unhappy brother, whom a cruel disease carried off very soon.

These different examples soon convinced us how precious it would be to the blind to possess the means of extending their knowledge, without their being obliged to wait for, or sometimes even in vain to demand, the assistance of those who saw.

If the execution of these means appeared to us possible, it did not fail at first to present us with some difficulties. We had need of encouragement, we confess. Mademoiselle Paradis arrived in this metropolis. She shewed us her attempts, and those of M. Weissenbourg. We collected those of the blind who lived before our time; we put into execution several of their proceedings; to these we joined the results of our own, and we formed a general plan of the Institution. There was only wanting a person upon whom we might try our first experiments. Providence deigned, without doubt, to direct our choice upon him.

Francois le Sueur, struck with blindness in consequence of convulsions at the age of six weeks, had not, at the age of seventeen years and a half, any notion relative to literature. Descended from a respectable family, but entirely deprived of the advantages of fortune, and constrained to seek the means of subsistence in the place frequented by people least easy in their circumstances, although perhaps the most laborious, the blind youth scarcely enjoyed the use of reason, when he was afraid of being burdensome to his parents; he soon found himself under the necessity of going and presenting himself at the gates of our temples, there to crave that kind of unsubstantial and momentary

assistance which is given by those who enter, which the indigent often obtain with difficulty from the rich, who industriously avoid their importunities. Full of joy at the least acquisition, he flies with eagerness to the bosom of his unhappy family, to divide the fruit of his solicitations, with the authors of his being, and with three sisters and two brothers, whereof the last is still upon the breast. It was in the midst of this hard life, as little calculated to inspire as to favour a taste for the sciences, that our first pupil began his education. Soon did a noble enthusiasm wholly take possession of him; he snatched from the necessity of labouring for his existence, those moments which he consecrated to study. His efforts were not slow in being followed with success. They demanded of us to see the result of our proceedings; we seized the favourable circumstance of an Academical Assembly, where we were appointed to read a memorial. We took for its subject certain reflections on the education of the blind. M. le Noir, then the magistrate, charged with the administration of the police, was president of this assembly. He saw our first attempts, received them with that concern with which he presently inspired Ministers, protectors of arts and indigence. M. le Compte de Vergennes, M. le Baron de Breteuil, Mr. Comptroller General, and Mr. Keeper of the Seals, were kindly willing to permit that the young Sueur should perform his exercises in their presence, and all these respectable witnesses encouraged our first pupil by their beneficence.

But whilst we were employed in delineating our plan of education for blind children, already had a company of beneficent gentlemen, composed of members of the first distinction, for their birth, their employments, their fortune or their talents; depositaries of the public benefits of which every one inclines to increase the mass according to his wealth; who snatching an interval from their business or their leisure hours go twice every month to employ themselves at the bottom of a cloister, far from the public observation, about the means of diminishing the number of the unfortunate; already, I say, had the Philanthropic Society laid the foundation of this institution. Twelve poor blind children received from this company each one the assistance of twelve livres per month. Satisfied with our first trials, they designed to intrust us with the care of these unfortunate people. We were not slow in conceiving the hope of adding, to the assistance which they had given them, the product of their labours. What obligations have we not to acknowledge to the whole of this respectable society? And why is it not permitted to us to name those of its members, who having neither reputation nor fortune to acquire, have shared with us, modestly and in silence, the numerous details into which the education of this establishment leads us?

Very soon did our institution acquire a new degree of importance in the eyes of the public. Then they ceased to believe that the power of receiving by touch the education which we proposed was restricted to an individual alone favoured with the propensities inspired by nature. Of the 14 blind children instructed in the first rudiments, there were then found only three whose progress had been slow; because enjoying still a weak ray of light, they obtained at least from touch what remained to them almost entirely lost from the weakness of their sight.

There remained no more to put the last hand to this establishment but the testimony of the learned upon these means. The Academy of Sciences has designed to employ itself in examining them, and drew up the report which we have inserted at the end of this work.

Led by the suffrages of people instructed, by their own experience, by the emotions of a heart disposed to favour the good, the public has been eager from all quarters to contribute to the expense of rearing a house which we have built for suffering nature.

The Royal Academy of Music performed on the 19th of February, 1786, for the benefit of blind children, a concert, in which the audience were divided on one hand between the noble disinterestedness of the members, and on the other between the talents which they displayed on that occasion.

In short, the Lyceum, the Museum, and the Hall of Correspondence disputed among themselves with emulation the agreeable satisfaction of seeing, in the midst of their academical meetings, young blind children lisp out the first elements of reading, of calculation, &c., and in the scenes of learned emulation, where Genius alone had till then found encouragement, beneficence has, for the first time, been seen decreeing a crown.

Enthusiasm gained over particular societies; and the exercises of blind children were always terminated by some acquisition in their fabour, sent to the house of the Philanthropic Society, who joining their assistance to what was produced by the funds of the Institution, distributed the sums to them with the tenderness which a good mother equally feels for every one of her children.

Thirty of these unfortunate children,with these assistances, partake the advantages of our institution. Several others, too young to be set to work, receive no less that relief to which their sad situation seems to secure them a right. But in the actual state in which our establishment is, we beg our readers not to regard it but as a beginning. We hope that their sagacity will show them, in these first fruits, a pledge of that success which they promise in the sequel. It is thus that an attentive observer of the productions of nature sees, that the buds which the spring causes to shoot forth from all parts of the trees, announces the fruits which autumn will produce.